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SUBJECT: EASTERN DRC NOTES - DECEMBER 22

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¶1. (U) The items contained in this report consist principally of spot information from various sources. This report is not exhaustive, nor can all the information contained therein be confirmed at this time.

Security Situation

¶2. (SBU) Given increased activity by both CNDP and PARECO north of Masisi (reftel), MONUC plans to increase air patrols in the area to better gauge CNDP intentions. A MONUC Goma briefer speculated that CNDP may seek to move into mineral-rich areas near Pinga, thus completely bypassing Masisi. The FDLR maintains a controlling presence in many of the mines in this area. MONUC also plans to increase patrols south of Kanyabayonga, where Mai Mai activity has markedly increased in the past week.

¶3. (SBU) Commenting on eyewitness reports of large numbers of FARDC troops massing in Kombati on the southern shore of Lake Edward (reftel), MONUC Forward Force Chief of Staff Lieutenant Colonel James Cunliffe told Goma Poloff that the FARDC had a large presence in the area, but he was not aware of "thousands" of FARDC troops in the area. Cunliffe promised to pass the information to the North Kivu Commander to investigate.

¶4. (SBU) A UN Security briefing noted increased insecurity on the Sake-Masisi road, which the CNDP controls. There were reports of fighting between two PARECO factions in Vitumbi over the right to collect taxes.

¶5. (SBU) With PARECO forces present 15 kilometers from Kiwanja, CNDP reportedly shored up its contingents along Kiwanja's periphery. UN and NGO sources reported that heavily-armed PARECO forces, with new equipment, were building up at Kisharu and Ishasha, possibly planning to move towards Kiwanja. The FDLR, according to the UN, has indicated its intention to step up attacks against CNDP-controlled areas.

¶6. (SBU) Forced recruitment by the CNDP continues in Rutshuru, Tongo, Rugari, Kibumba, and Rumangabo. Apparently, more than 100 families, whose children have been forcibly recruited in the past two weeks, filed a complaint with the rebel group.

¶7. (SBU) According to the UN, Rutshuru residents have begun to complain to the CNDP about their lack of access to agricultural fields, as well as insufficient humanitarian assistance in the area.

FARDC/FDLR Operations Against FDLR

¶8. (SBU) On the margins of the December 19 JMG Task Force Meeting (septel), Franco Rutagengwa, Head of the Rwandan delegation, told

Goma Poloff that Rwandan troops, imbedded in FARDC units to combat the FDLR, would most likely not participate in ground operations. Rather, RDF troops would assist the FARDC with planning, support, and coordination of actions against the FDLR.

¶9. (SBU) In a subsequent discussion with Goma PolOff, MONUC Forward Force Commander Lieutenant Colonel James Cunliffe noted that MONUC would play a supporting role in FARDC/RDF operations against the FDLR. Cunliffe expressed doubts about the FARDC's capacity to undertake effective action against the FDLR.

LRA: Operation Lightning Thunder

¶10. (SBU) According to MONUC Goma, the UPDF Commander in Dungu claimed that Kony's last known position was in Camp Swahili in the northwestern part of Garamba Park on December 14, only hours before the UPDF assault began. At the time of the attack, he was reportedly with 300 LRA fighters. Kony and his troops reportedly fled into the forest.

¶11. (SBU) The UPDF has asked MONUC for helicopter support to persuade LRA members in the forest to surrender. This operation would include dropping leaflets and using loudspeakers to guide LRA combatants and their dependents to regroupment areas. The UPDF told MONUC that it expects large numbers of LRA members to defect/surrender. To date, only six LRA dependents have surrendered.

¶12. (SBU) A local NGO leader told post on December 22 that the LRA had "lost lots of human and material resources" during the attack.

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Imam Abd Shakur Shukrani, leader of the Bunia Muslim community, told post that the LRA had been dislodged from many positions from where they had harassed the local population. However, according to Shukrani, the remaining LRA elements had dispersed over a large area, with many locals expecting reprisals. Shukrani said that the LRA had distributed pamphlets in which it warned that the group would attack MONUC and exact harsher treatment on the local population.

GARVELINK